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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Thursday, April 19, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Choosing Cotton Fabrics." Information from Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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My Next-Door Neighbor came over last night to tell me about her recent shopping tour.

"The most fascinating place in the world," she said, "is a big department store in the spring. Especially the yard goods section. Did you ever see such beautiful organdies and voiles and cotton prints? How can any woman resist buying a few yards of material and a pattern book?"

I asked her what she had bought, and she showed me a pretty cotton seersucker -- white, with bright red crossbars in half-inch squares. "That's for a sports dress," she informed me. "In case I take up bad-minton this spring, or tennis. And look at this lovely pattern -- a seersucker organdie. Don't you like the soft blue color, in a crisp crinkly fabric? For an afternoon dress. Seersucker is so easy to wash. It doesn't need ironing. What could be better for hot summer days?"

I admired the new material, and was glad to see that my friend had selected fabrics without too much crinkle. Seersucker keeps its shape better if there are some plain parts in the weave.

"Here's another of my purchases," said my neighbor. "A thin lawn. Don't you think these Mexican colors are smart?" Actually, she was so pleased with her bright new cotton dress materials that she was humming a tune -- "Did You Ever See a Dream Walking."

"I won't look exactly like a dream," she said, "because I'm inclined to be a trifle stout, and of course nobody ever saw a stout dream. But I do think my new dresses will be stylish and becoming. I'm going to cut out the sports dress this afternoon, so it will be ready to wear the first hot day. What are you looking for? The label, I told her. It would be a pity to make a dress of such pretty material, and find out too late that it would shrink and fade.

"Don't worry," said my neighbor. "I told the saleslady that I wanted only pre-shrunk materials, and that they must be color-fast to both light and laundering We hunted around until we found marks or tags that guaranteed a reliable material. You'd be surprised, though, how hard it is to find a label that says something definite. The first label I found said 'Satisfaction Guaranteed.' But what good is a label like that, when such items as color fastness and shrinkage are not even mentioned?"

While we were on the subject, I told my friend about the collection of labels Clarice Scott of the Bureau of Home Economics is making. She has labels from fabrics and labels from ready-made garments. Some of them come right out and tell the truth, and others are very vague.

Of course, there are some labels we can trust. One of them is an acorn-shaped tag or mark that says, "Mafal tested fast colors." M-a-f-a-l. That's the kind of label that means something, and it's too bad there aren't more like it on cotton goods. The National Association of Finishers of Cotton Fabrics stands back of this particular label. They finance real laboratory tests made in accordance with methods set up by a national association of textile chemists. Their label gives us definite assurance that the fabrics are fast to both light and washing.

"What about a label that says 'Guaranteed Fast Color'?" my neighbor wanted to know.

Well, there may be a catch or two in that one. In the first place, there's no mention of reliable laboratory tests. In the second place, the fabric may be fast to <u>washing</u>, and fade in the <u>light</u>. A cotton material that is really color-fast will stand both the light and the water tests. Miss Scott's collection of labels includes only two that state definitely that the color will hold in both light and washing.

"Another question," said my friend, "Is it true that some colors are better than others? Is blue, for instance, less likely to fade than lavender?"

According to the textile chemists -- and they know what they are talking about -- there's nothing to the old idea that pink and blue, for instance, are more reliable colors than green and lavender. It's simply a question of the quality of dye. We now have good fast dyes for all the standard colors, and there's no reason why we can't get greens and lavenders and some of the pretty intermediate shades that are just as color-fast as the old reliable turkey-red and navy-blue.

"What about shrinkage?" asked my neighbor. "Are we safe in buying cotton goods marked 'Pre-shrunk'?"

When we buy cotton goods marked "Pre-shrunk," we can be reasonably sure that it has gone through a shrinking process. But that is no definite assurance that the material won't shrink more when it is laundered. Miss Scott has found a number of labels that say "Will Not Shrink," which of course means a great deal more than "Pre-shrunk."

Right now there's a movement among the cotton textile manufacturers and distributors to get even more definite labels, covering shrinkage, on cotton goods. They are hoping to work out some plan whereby we can tell when we buy the goods just how much we can expect it to shrink -- one percent, two percent, or three.

Ruth O'Brien of the textiles division of the Bureau of Home Economics, attends the meetings called by the American Standards Association, the organization which is sponsoring the movement at the present time. Naturally the Bureau is interested in definite labels which help the consumer to buy more intelligently.

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